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INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
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RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN PRIORITY 0362
RUEHDO/AMEMBASSY DOHA PRIORITY 0284
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 0338
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID PRIORITY 1885
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 0666
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY
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RUEHDS/USMISSION USAU ADDIS ABABA PRIORITY
RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE PRIORITY
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 0404
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0779

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NOUAKCHOTT 000707

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/30/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [PTER](#) [MR](#)
SUBJECT: GENERAL AZIZ ADDRESSES THE NATION, PRESIDENT
ABDALLAHI MUZZLED ON MAURITANIAN NATIONAL DAY

REF: NOUAKCHOTT 696

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Dennis Hankins for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: General Aziz made a televised speech to the nation on Mauritanian National Day (November 28), but he offered no new proposals or changes in the High State Council's policy. Meanwhile, President Abdallahi was reportedly forbidden from meeting with journalists in his native village of Lemden. This prevented him from making a planned address to the nation on the Mauritanian holiday, demonstrating the HSC's unwillingness to share the limelight with Abdallahi. End summary.

¶2. (U) General Aziz, President of the High State Council (military junta) delivered a long-winded televised speech to the nation on the occasion of Mauritania's 48th anniversary of independence (November 28). Aziz touched on practically every issue facing Mauritania, from poverty, drug trafficking, and illegal immigration to corruption, health care, and education. Aziz focused particularly on fighting corruption and the drug trade, stating that "the High State Council is committed to eradicating the usage and trafficking of drugs." As for terrorism, Aziz pledged to eliminate its societal root causes (without stating what those root causes were), and to reorganize the armed forces and security services to confront the threat. He further stated that the recently-created special anti-terror units would be backed up by an "aerial deterrent" (again, no details provided). Aziz closed his speech by justifying the coup, saying that it was necessary to "save the country from the dangers it faced." Claiming that government institutions continued to function democratically, he called on all Mauritans to participate in the upcoming consultation days in order to determine the length of the democratic transition period and to set the conditions for organizing "a transparent and democratic presidential election."

¶3. (C) Acting DCM attended the flag ceremony held at the Presidential Palace on Mauritanian National Day. The ceremony was a tightly-controlled and highly-scripted event. In contrast to previous years, this year the head-of-state-handshaking with the diplomatic corps and the presentation of medals to various Mauritanian figures was completed before the flag was raised. Comment: It is likely the High State Council inverted the traditional order of the flag ceremony to prevent the diplomatic corps from

potentially bolting as soon as the flag was raised, thereby snubbing General Aziz. End comment. The French, Spanish, and German ambassadors attended the ceremony, as did Defense Attaches from several Western countries. Note: The US DATT did not attend. End note.

¶4. (U) Multiple local media reports state that President Abdallahi, still under house arrest in his native village of Lemden, was unable to receive journalists over the weekend, with large teams of security forces deployed in the village. Abdallahi was supposed to have delivered an address to the nation on Mauritanian National Day. The security forces reportedly left the village just before an envoy of President Sarkozy arrived to discuss the current situation in the country with Abdallahi.

¶5. (C) Comment: Despite the junta's claims that Abdallahi is free, this latest episode in Lemden demonstrates the limited nature of that "freedom." It is clear that the HSC did not want a public address by Abdallahi to be aired the same day that Aziz delivered a speech to the nation. Whether or not the HSC will permit Abdallahi to meet with journalists in the future remains to be seen. In any event, as reported in Ref A, Abdallahi now appears to have less opportunity to communicate directly with the Mauritanian people.

¶6. (C) Aziz, who sat behind a desk reading his speech word for word, rarely looked up at the camera, and did not project a particularly inspiring or stirring image to the Mauritanian people. (In fact, Aziz did not hold a single event with the people on Mauritanian National Day, in contrast to his

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numerous visits to neighborhoods of Nouakchott and regional towns over the past few weeks.) As for the content of the speech itself, it was long on lofty promises, and short on details. Aziz did not offer any new proposals or plans for either the economic or political situation. Like other speeches Aziz has made to the public, it rehashed the same points that have been heard many times before by the HSC in its campaign to heighten public awareness of the motives behind the "rectification movement." End comment.

HANKINS